



Volume I, Issue 2

February, 1997

## Banking on Community

Maybe the neighborhood is the community bank. Some sociologists believe a neighborhood has capital just like a bank. "Social capital" is increased as people participate in public life: organize chess clubs, organize a church food pantry, support service clubs, coach Little League and serve on a committee to get a business to locate (or stay) in the neighborhood. This type of interaction builds communication, trust, and support among the participants. They make the neighborhood richer by increasing the "social capital."

A year ago, a process was started that may add social capital to the Martindale-Brightwood neighborhood on the northeast side of Indianapolis. Several pastors, the National City Bank, and the Edna Martin Center formed the Community Resurrection Partnership. They staked out a large field for work: "to enhance the quality of lives of individuals and families through charitable, religious, educational, recreational, housing and economic development ministries." The group has come through the pangs of birth, forming a non-profit corporation, choosing officers, and recruiting other churches. They have begun to establish relationships with community development corporations and the Indianapolis Church Federation. It looks like the pieces are falling into place. It also looks like a venture worth watching.

THE POLIS CENTER's research into Indianapolis congregations and their communities shows how religious groups deposit assets into the neighborhood. Turning abandoned space into a bustling academy and a house of worship symbolizes the transformation from despair to hope. Harvest Prayer Center, for instance, occupies space in the middle of a Lafayette Road strip mall that has seen better days. The 450 members of the congregation and the children in the Academy come and go through this once-empty space all week. They are saying, "This is our home." And the sparkling halls and large, well-lit rooms show they mean it.

## Faithful Service

Service and witness are the two poles that guide and sometimes strain the life of a congregation. A nagging question for some churches is "How can we serve the needs of people and still affirm our faith?" There is help for those wrestling with that question in Thomas Jeavons' *When Faithfulness is the Bottom Line* (Indiana University Press, 1994). Here is how he brings mission and witness together: "[T]he determination of witness has to be the business of believers. The character of service . . . should finally be the outgrowth of . . . faith commitments." The route to a decision on how a congregation serves others "must involve the spiritual work of prayer and discernment, and those involved in these processes must be persons who share similar fundamental assumptions about how one comes to know God's will."

To Jeavons, there is no separation between faith and action. What's important is the manner in which services are provided and whether positive relationships are created between servers and served. He thinks that if social action programs are shaped through the actions of the religious life (liturgy, prayer, study), then faith and mission will be of one piece.

Jeavons writes with religious service organizations in mind, but with a little bit of translation his book is valuable for congregations who want to keep faith and social action together.

## Are you interested?

A chance for clergy dialogue is offered in a series of *Research Notes from Faith and Community* to be published occasionally by THE POLIS CENTER. Each issue will focus on a single topic relevant to the metropolitan religious scene. The first issue describes the variety of religious groups included in the larger greater Indianapolis region. In the publication, Arthur Farnsley II discusses the various faith traditions found in Indianapolis, their percentage of the total population, and their role in the community.

Readers are asked to respond to some questions that arise from the information:

- Do you think that Indianapolis has a white Protestant core?
- How does your assessment of the metropolitan religious distribution differ from that reported?
- What has been overlooked?

Feedback from readers will be reported in the next issue of *Research Notes*.

If you would like to receive *Research Notes from Faith and Community*, call THE POLIS CENTER at 317/274-2455, send an e-mail request to [Polis@iupui.edu](mailto:Polis@iupui.edu), or write to THE POLIS CENTER at 301 Cavanaugh Hall, 425 University Blvd., Indianapolis IN 46202.

---

THE POLIS CENTER  
425 University Boulevard, CA 301  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46202-5140

NON-PROFIT ORG. U.S. POSTAGE PAID PERMIT #4245 Indianapolis, IN
--